

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ROME 00697 161908Z

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ACTION EUR-12

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TAGS: PFOR, IT, YU

SUBJECT: REPORTED SHOOTING INCIDENT ON YUGOSLAV-ITALIAN BORDER

1. ACCORDING TO REPORTS APPEARING IN NEWSPAPERS JANUARY 14, A SHOOTING INCIDENT OCCURRED ON THE YUGOSLAV SIDE OF THE ITALIAN-YUGOSLAV BORDER IN THE VICINITY OF GORIZIA ON JANUARY 11 IN WHICH TWO INDIVIDUALS WERE ALLEGEDLY SHOT AND KILLED BY YUGOSLAV BORDER GUARDS. PRESS REPORTS, ALLEGEDLY BASED ON INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM LOCAL RESIDENTS WHO HEARD THE SHOTS, INDICATED THAT THE INCIDENT OCCURRED BETWEEN 150 AND 200 METERS INSIDE YUGOSLAVIA AND THAT THE VICTIMS WERE PROBABLY INDIVIDUALS TRYING TO CROSS THE BORDER ILLEGALLY INTO ITALY. RESIDENTS WHO INVESTIGATED THE SOUNDS OF THE SHOTS REPORTEDLY SIGHTED TWO MOTIONLESS BODIES IN THE AREA OF THE INCIDENT. THE EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS THAT ITALIAN TELEVISION HAD FAIRLY EXTENSIVE COVERAGE OF THE ALLEGED INCIDENT ON NEWSCASTS JANUARY 13 AND 14.

2. JANUARY 15 NEWSPAPERS HAVE REPORTED DENIALS OF THE ALLEGED INCIDENT BY THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC SECURITY OF NUOVO GORICA (YUGOSLAVIA) AND BY THE SLOVENE SECRETARY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS, WHICH WERE BROADCAST OVER A REGIONAL RADIO

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PAGE 02 ROME 00697 161908Z

STATION AT MIDDAY ON JANUARY 14. SUBSEQUENTLY, THE CHIEF

OF THE FRONTIER POLICE OF NUOVO GORICA MET WITH HIS ITALIAN COUNTERPART TO DENY THE ALLEGATIONS OF AN INCIDENT. ARTICLES APPEARING JANUARY 15 ALSO NOTE THAT TWO YUGOSLAVS, ATTEMPTING TO REACH FRANCE, WERE DETAINED ON THE ITALIAN SIDE OF THE BORDER ON JANUARY 11 AND RETURNED TO YUGOSLAVIA ON JANUARY 12, SINCE THEY DID NOT QUALIFY FOR POLITICAL ASYLUM.

3. CONSUL RACHMALES REPORTS FROM TRIESTE THAT LOCAL OFFICIALS CONFIRM AN INCREASED STATE OF VIGILANCE IN THE AREA BY YUGOSLAV BORDER GUARDS. IN A RECENT INCIDENT NEAR THE CUSTOMS POINT IN SAN BARTOLOMEO, FOR EXAMPLE, SHOTS WERE FIRED ON THE YUGOSLAVIAN SIDE, ONE OF WHICH LODGED APPARENTLY BY ACCIDENT IN A BUILDING ON THE ITALIAN SIDE. LOCAL AUTHORITIES HAVE ALSO CONFIRMED THAT TWO YUGOSLAVS RESIDENT IN THE AREA RECENTLY SLIPPED ACROSS THE BORDER. THEY WERE APPREHENDED AND REMOVED FROM A MILAN-BOUND TRAIN AND RETURNED THE NEXT DAY TO YUGOSLAV AUTHORITIES. AT LEAST ONE OF THE TWO IS KNOWN TO HAVE A CRIMINAL RECORD. DESPITE THE FOREGOING, THERE IS NO EVIDENCE, OFFICIAL OR UNOFFICIAL, OF INDIVIDUALS ACTUALLY HAVING BEEN SHOT AS ALLEGED PER PARA ONE ABOVE.

4. COMMENT. WHILE THE REAL DETAILS OF THE INCIDENT REMAIN MURKY, IT DOES HAVE THE POSSIBILITY OF INTRODUCING A NEW IRRITANT INTO YUGOSLAV-ITALIAN BILATERAL RELATIONS. THE TIMING IS ESPECIALLY UNFORTUNATE GIVEN THE GRADUAL IMPROVEMENT OVER RECENT MONTHS IN THESE BILATERAL RELATIONS FOLLOWING THE RIFT OVER THE TRIESTE/ZONE B ISSUE WHICH ERUPTED LAST MARCH. OF PARTICULAR CONCERN TO THE YUGOSLAVS COULD BE THE EXTENT OF THE PUBLIC COVERAGE OF THE ALLEGED INCIDENT, ESPECIALLY THE TELEVISION REPORTAGE. VOLPE

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